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OUR ISHMAEL.

You may see him in all our crowded centers of life, this Ishmael of the city desert, this appalling product of modern industrialism, this distorted travesty of childhood—the street boy, newsboy, bootblack, fakir; and in all these guises, convenient scapegoat upon whose defenseless head the indiscriminating policeman daily wreaks the vengeance of outraged society.

Thrust upon the street while yet a mere infant, and made to add his small quota to the family earnings, his pennies sometimes supplement the hard-earned dollars his mother—bending over the washboard, or crawling over office floors—painfully brings to the support of the family in a fatherless, or worse than fatherless, home. Sometimes the shortsighted greed of the Old World peasant sends the toddler to the pavement with the warning that it will not be well for him to return with unsold papers, or lacking their price in his baby hand.

Whatever be the motive that starts the boy upon his industrial career as a sidewalk merchant or mechanic, he usually continues in this primary commercial school until he is of an age and stature to command some more lucrative employment; for after a year or two of this vagrant life it is almost impossible to induce a boy to submit to the restraints of ordinary school life, even when, in rare cases, the opportunity opens for him to exchange the freedom of the street for the confinement and discipline of the schoolroom.

This training of the street produces certain well-marked effects upon those who survive its hardships—effects that lead the child of poor heredity, the degenerate, the weakling, by a clearly traceable path to the reform school, the house of correction, the penitentiary. But upon the boy of stronger fiber, possessed of physical vigor, ingenuity, will-power, and a certain elemental honesty, the effect of this harsh training is not, perhaps, altogether bad, considering the conditions he must meet as he advances in life; it certainly develops courage, persistency,

fertility of resource—traits that make for success in the commercial world of today. You will find little of the primal sweetness of childhood here; all that innocent bloom and fragrance that adorns the homes where children are tenderly cherished is soon trampled under foot and lost, when the blossom is flung into the mire of the street. The virtues and the vices of the street boy are his own, and the most striking characteristic of both is their unchildishness.

In this commercial school of the street the boy is cruelly trained to look sharply after number one; but in the poor home from which he comes he is taught, from the time he can run alone and voice his feeble battlecry upon the cross-ways, his obligation to others, more helpless than himself, if that be possible. For the sick mother, the baby brother, the father, superannuated in middle life by a process that is bringing him to the same goal, he works and denies himself, as a matter of course; and his unflinching zeal in the service of his family is certainly one of his shining virtues, in spite of the fact that it too often shows itself in glibbest mendacity, deftest sleight-of-hand, and a general impudence of cunning before which the mind "indifferent honest" stands bewildered.

Pass apples or cakes about in a crowd of these boys, and the rapidity with which they will disappear will convince you that a goodly number have been crammed into dirty pockets so surreptitiously that it would be impossible for the keenest eye to detect their passage. Subsequent investigation will show that very many of these goodies were taken home to younger brothers or sisters, or some sick or helpless member of the family to whom special consideration was due.

Boys who have apparently no disposition to take things from the club-room for their own use will not hesitate when tempted by an article which is needed at home; thus one little fellow whom I knew, and trusted, with wonderful secrecy and cunning extracted the tacks from a piece of oil cloth, and, when his guilt was brought home to him, confessed that he had taken them for his mother, who needed them to mend a chair. Another abstracted the colored plates from a magazine, to the indignation

of his fellows, and defended himself on the ground that "De baby's sick, ye know; and she likes pictures; dey keeps her from cryin'—see?" The club gave sympathetic consideration to this plea, but finally pronounced that "He didn't need to hook 'em," meaning that, if he had asked, they would, under these circumstances, have been given to him; and I doubt not they would have been. Sly as they are in these transactions "on de side," they are all very boastful of their prowess in legitimate business, and fond of comparing adventures around the club-room fire.

"Once I heard a man on de street say it was war," said a boy shortly after the blowing up of the "Maine." "I was playin' nibs in de alley; but wen I heard dat, I skipped home to get me money. I knew dere'd be a nextra. Me mudder was gone out, but I got de bank where we kept de money. I couldn't open it, but I smashed it wid a stone. Dere was most four dollars in it. I run all de way to de *Journal* office. I was de first. It was a beat—sure. I was out all night, and"—with immense pride—"I made most nine dollars." "What did you do with the money?" I asked. "O, I give it to me mudder; she had to have it for de kids."

"I made five dollars last time 'twas 'lection," said another, a pretty Russian-Jewish boy; "but I got so tired und sleepy. I went into a saloon and lay down by de stove. It was rainin'. I put me hand over me pocket dat had de money in, and went to sleep. But a bloke he moved me hand while I was sleepin', und took de money off me. I found out who he was, und I laid for him all right. One night I hid in de alley by de saloon, und when I see him comin', I up wid a big rock und took him in de back. You ought ter heard him holler!" It was the dreadful fate of this boy to see his mother burned to death in the explosion of a gasoline stove. A neighbor came running to tell me of the tragedy, and I went at once to the poor home. The wail of the orphan reached my ears as I turned into the alley upon which the board shanty fronted; but even while the boy clung to me, and sobbed out his grief and horror, he sought to make interest with me for the disposal of "de kids." He had four sisters, all younger than himself; and these were to be, for the

present at least, distributed among relatives of his mother; all as poor as himself, but all ready, as people of his race ever are, to help those of their own blood. But none of the overworked mothers could undertake "de baby." A place was found for this waif in a babies' home. And the big brother—he was then fourteen—went bravely to work, shouldering a responsibility that might have staggered a grown man. "I got to buy dere close anyways," he explained; "but I had to help before; father's no good."

A year later this boy was seized with typhoid fever, and languished for months in the county hospital. I visited him there and satisfied myself that he had good care. In his delirium he always hailed me with a mysterious, beckoning gesture; and, as I bent over him, invariably confided, in a hoarse whisper, while his hot hands clutched mine: "Dey took away me pants, Miss Law, and dere's fifteen hunder dollars in de pocket. Won't you please und take care of it for me? Dey want to steal me money off me. It's dat nurse dat done it." Night and day he raved of money, of bargains, and "swipes," over which he exulted slyly; or he recounted the things he had bought for "de kids;" or berated them with vivid expletives, for wearing out their shoes so fast. "But I'll git yer some more, sis!" he said once, adding as he turned wearily on his pillow: "You can't wear such thick ones like me, 'cause you're a girl." Some one injudiciously informed him, while he was convalescing, that he had accused the nurse of stealing from him, and he was deeply mortified and very penitent. "I feel so 'shamed," he said, as he sat one afternoon in his chair by the bedside, pushing back his long hair with his skeleton hand; "I feel so 'shamed to think I said dat to de nurse, und she was so good to me, too; but I told her I was sorry."

I have dwelt upon this case because it seems to me to be typical in many ways. I cannot picture this little fellow as a story-book saint. I have shown him exactly as I saw him; as, alas! I see him yet in my daily walks. He is now a tall, lanky youth of seventeen. The pretty boyish face is gone, and I discern more clearly every day the growing image of the low-

class young Jew—smart, cunning, with an inveterate propensity to lie in wait for shady opportunities, and chuckle over them in retrospect. He is still the newsboy, the itinerant street vender, the seeker after “swipes” of every description. He has been placed from time to time in good situations. He is generally liked by his employers, but he will not stay with them; in every case he soon wanders back to the street. He seems to make sufficient money, and he sometimes stops me to recount with pride the efforts he is making in behalf of “de kids,” who are fast growing up, and will soon be out in the world for themselves.

It may be said of our Ishmael that he is always a liar, if not from the womb, at least from the doorstep whence he makes his first plunge into the world. He is a fighter, of course; his little fist is always clenched, and he is as noisy and vainglorious in his bullying as the sparrows that share the street with him. Not long since on a crowded street in Milwaukee, my attention was attracted to a writhing tangle of small legs and arms in the gutter beside me. Descending to investigate, I discovered two newsboys administering a “thumping” to a smaller boy, a mere mite, possibly five years old. The mite’s pretty yellow curls were all mud-bedabbled, and his tears mingled with gore from his smitten nose as he rose and promptly ran away upon my releasing him. “Very nice boys you are!” I remarked severely, as I set the culprits upon the curbstone, keeping fast hold of their ragged collars as I did so. “Two big boys beating a little one!” “Well, well!” they both eagerly protested at once; “wat does he allers cut in ahead for? De folks buys papers off him ’cause he’s little und his hair curls. He ain’t no better’n us. We told him to keep on his own beat; but he won’t—no! And when a man stops to buy a paper, up he comes a-runnin’ und sticks hisself in; und de ladies dey say, ‘Oh, wat a prettey boy! Wat lo-ovely curls!’ (this in high falsetto voice, and with indescribable affectations of fine ladyism). “We’ll pretty him. Dere he goes now.” They snatched their collars from my hold, and sped away in pursuit of their interrupted vengeance.

One trait of our boy, that stands in the way of his social

betterment, is his rooted distrust of all endeavor in his behalf. The first task of one who would do him good must be to gain his confidence; and this is no easy matter. The idea that beneath every expression of interest, every offered kindness, lies some deep-laid, sinister scheme to "work him" has been too deeply ingrained by his commercial training to be easily overcome. "Ah, wat yer givin' us?" is the question too often flung at the missionary or the settlement worker who approaches him with benevolent intent. Yet, his confidence once won, his unswerving loyalty may be depended upon; though he will show you his appreciation only in his own wild way.

Of all the means that have been devised for opening the gates of life a little wider before these prematurely aged young faces, these lamentably worldly young eyes, the boys' club has been, I believe, the most productive of lasting impressions for good. The democratic spirit of such an institution, properly conducted, seems well suited to their habits and ways of looking at things. One seeking to help them meets them here on the level of an apparent equality. The attitude of authority is not taken, nor is the note of dictation ever sounded. Thus one sees the boys as they really are, and learns the best ways of coming into personal contact with them individually.

Nor should this level of equality in the club-room be merely apparent. A boys' club should be, like any other, under the control of its members; this is, at least, the ideal which the leader should keep in view; nor is it practically unattainable. The inexperienced worker will be, I venture to say, surprised, at every step in this direction, to discover that very much of the working policy of the club may be safely intrusted to the plain business sense and keen wits of the boys, when once their interest in their club and their ambition for its success have been aroused.

As an illustration of this fact I call to mind an experience in a large newsboys' club with which I have been connected for the past six years. A young lady, rich and generous, came to me one summer, as we were about to close for the season, and expressed a desire to give the boys some kind of an outing as a

climax to the work of the year. She had set her heart on a steamer-ride down our beautiful bay, and far out into Lake Michigan, but had been a little dismayed to find that the steamer, with accompaniments of music and supper, would cost far more than she had expected. "I don't grudge them the money," said the young lady; "but is it wise to spend so much in an afternoon pleasure trip? We need so many things for the club next winter." The question being left to me for decision, I proposed that we submit it to the boys themselves; adding that, if we did so, we must be prepared to abide by their decision. This was done at once. I put the matter fairly before them, with all the arguments for and against, and we awaited their decision. It was not long in coming; some of the smaller boys clamored for the boat-ride, but the older ones were almost unanimous in voting against it. "Don't you spend all that money that way," they said; "we'd rather have it in the club next winter."

This sentiment of joint ownership in the club, of responsibility for its policy, is also the most effective check upon the thievish propensities of its members that can possibly be devised. To seek to circumvent their long-practiced cunning by a strict use of guards, locks, and constant espionage is a futile, as well as an ignoble, policy. It is a descending to the moral level of those whom you seek to uplift. Here, as elsewhere, it will be found that evil cannot be conquered by evil, but that good will conquer by disarming the evil desire.

When a boy has so far conquered the covetousness his hard lot of deprivation has bred into him that he can, night after night, use tools and games which all boys desire to possess, and at the closing hour put them in their places and leave them behind him, he has taken his first lesson, probably, in that social conduct which makes of the individual a good citizen of his community. I speak from personal experience when I assert that this lesson can be successfully taught by instilling the communal instinct into the life of the boys' club.

Again, one must consider the power of suggestion upon the imitative, inquisitive mind of the child. To parade an elaborate system of precautions against stealing before the eyes of boys

who have long made a careful study of possibilities in the way of overcoming these precautions, is to stimulate invention in the same direction; to put the boy who is proud of his ingenuity in foiling policemen and picking locks, upon his mettle. Far better is it to ignore such possibilities entirely; to awaken the boy's interest in other directions; to impress him with the idea that the club and all its furnishings are his, and can be best left intact for his use and that of his comrades.

One of the first things to be done is to win the leaders of "de gang," who always come to the front at once and act as spokesmen for the crowd. To circumvent the bully, and convert him from a jeering enemy to an applauding friend, may prove an arduous task, but it will always be worth while, from every point of view; and to make it apparent to him that you need his countenance and assistance in the conduct of affairs is usually the straight road to that result. You will often find that, under such responsibilities as you can impose upon him, he will after a while forget to snatch and crowd, and show himself assiduous in generosity and untiring in labors for the general good. The bully is by no means sure to prove the worst boy in the club, and will often develop into the most promising.

In these hardy boys, scantily clothed, poorly fed, inured to hardships of heat, cold, and wet, we do not find that sexual precocity of which we hear so much in these days from the teachers and guardians of boys more tenderly reared. Profanity and unclean language, indeed, roll out of the street boy's mouth as they might out of a talking machine into which they had been generously poured; but, in spite of this, he is really rather clean-minded than otherwise, and is noticeably free of those vices which sometimes wreck the boy whose life is far above his in point of privilege.

Here I may recount the significant fact that during my six years' service I encountered but one boy so persistently obscene in his language and conduct that even the janitor of the building where we met demanded his expulsion. He was a bright, rosy, pretty boy of twelve, a visitor from a luxurious home near

by. The German family from which he came was rather noted for indulgence in the use of wines and highly spiced foods. The little Arabs of the club laughed at this boy's obscenities, but passed them by as matters not particularly interesting to them.

The boys' club in our cities supplements, and in some cases takes the place of, the uncomfortable, unwholesome, unhomely home. "Home" for the street boy too often means a crowded room or two into which he may creep, late at night, and with fear and trembling if the day's business has been bad. In such a place he seeks but to crawl unobserved into some corner where, without washing or removing his clothes, he may rest his tired body and lose his troubled young soul for a few hours in the unconsciousness of sleep. Even when his home is fairly clean and comfortable, blessed with motherly love and fatherly care, there is usually so much privation, such stinting of wholesome childish joys, such gnawing anxieties, such grinding, incessant toil, that the boy craves some cheering, brightening, social life outside. The same need that drives his father, after a day of monotonous, uninteresting toil in the factory or the rolling-mill, to the saloon, drives the boy to the club-house; and there the lover of childhood may find him, and find that he will tax all the patience, all the love, that can be brought to bear upon him there.

I have talked with many people on the subject of boys' clubs, and have found that one great barrier to their multiplication is the belief that nothing can be accomplished in them without great expenditure of money. This is, I think, a mistake. We have in this country a few well-known club-houses for boys, reared and equipped with great outlay of money, and also with great care and wisdom, I am sure. Those who are privileged to work with the appliances of gymnasiums, bath-rooms, manual-training rooms, and libraries which these provide, are happy indeed, and should do effective work under such favoring conditions. But these things, desirable and helpful as they are, are not indispensable. Have them if you can—you who feel moved to take a hand in this noblest rescue work; rejoice over them with exceeding great joy, if they come to

you; but if they are unattainable, I beg you to believe that you can do good and great work without them. Go into one of the congested spots in your city where these boys live; hire a room, accessible to the street, and where no one will be disturbed by noise in the evening. Make this room warm and light; this is the first requisite. How many times have I heard the expression fervently uttered by blue lips as the small, shivering lads came running in out of the winter night: "Gee, it's warm! Ain't dis bully?"

Have plenty of cheap, stout tables and chairs. Cover the walls with pictures; the tables with books, magazines, and illustrated papers. These may be second-hand, given by people who have read them and are glad to give them away, if you cannot afford to have new ones. There are many inexpensive games that interest boys; I have found that checkers never palls, but will be taken up, evening after evening, with unfailing zest. Keep a corner where the smaller boys can play "mibs." As soon as you can, put a punching-bag in another corner. Bring as many bright, cultured, and interesting people to meet the boys as you can persuade to come. Nothing will please the boys better, and nothing will do them more good. For yourself, do not be too effusive; do not smile perfunctorily, nor affect anything you do not really feel. Children always detect the sham, and these children resent it openly. Above all things, don't be preachy-preachy; don't point the moral; don't adorn the tale with the too garishly apt personal application. Don't be intrusive in your desire to be helpful; don't plan their games for them, to the minutest detail. Never mind about teaching them anything at first; it is not teaching they need, but socializing—humanizing.

A piano is a most excellent thing to have; and easy to obtain for this purpose in any city. I have found dealers ever willing to contribute—not a Steinway grand perhaps, but an instrument upon which dance music and popular songs may be played sufficiently well. If you are fortunate enough to be able to keep a pretty, gentle young lady on the piano stool three hours at a stretch, be sure the boys will throng around her until you will fear for her life.

It always interested me to note the choice of the boys in the matter of songs. The popular street song of the day has its vogue, of course, and passes; but in our club, there were certain established favorites which were demanded every evening, and never failed to evoke a roof-lifting chorus, that stopped the passers on the sidewalk and made them look inquiringly into our uncurtained windows. One of these was "A Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight." At the first sound of

When you hear those bells go ting-a-ling,
All join hands and sweetly we will sing,

the last boy would come running from the farthest corner, crowding his marbles into his pockets as he ran, to join in the favorite chorus. But the song of songs in our club has ever been that lugubrious ditty "The Drummer-Boy's Farewell." If there ever was a time when anxious spectators really feared that the delicate little girl on the piano stool would be crushed between the mass of crowding boys and the front of the instrument, when the inexperienced cast doubtful looks at the cornice and the windows, it was when every voice was lifted in the chorus:

O break the news to mother; she knows how dear I love her;
And kiss her dear, sweet face for me—
For I'm not coming home.

The never-failing popularity of this song could only have been on account of the sentiment it expressed. The music was of the wailing, dragging kind particularly abhorred by the boys. It must have been the picture evoked—of a boy, wounded, lying on the ground, at night, after the great battle; lonely, suffering, and longing for his mother. Of course, nothing would have induced the smallest boy to acknowledge this interest; and if any bystander had been so ill-advised as to seek to improve the occasion by appealing to such sentiment as the song suggested, he would, in all probability, have been greeted by a howl of derision and a request to "come off." I would not have the prospective leader of the boys' club draw the conclusion from this paper that the work is easy, or that appreciable results will quickly follow. You will, dear worker, be an object of deep

suspicion, perhaps for many months. Your least mistake will be greeted with yells of derision. The boys will take what you give them, and stand aloof, with watchful, doubtful eyes. There will seem to be a diabolical conspiracy among them to make all the trouble they possibly can, and the demon of destruction will be let loose. Never mind! This is the test they put you to. If they break the lock on the front door, say nothing; buy another one. If the padlock, which is your next resort, is smashed with a stone, rebuke the dealer who sold it to you, if you choose, but not the boy who broke it, even if you can find him—which you cannot. If a bedlam of disorderly conduct breaks out suddenly and unaccountably some evening, do not expostulate or accuse. It is probably a concerted thing, as deliberately planned as a general would plan a battle. Simply put out the lights, lock the door, and go away, regardless of any amount of expostulation from disappointed and protesting boys. Leave the place dark for a while, and let them speculate on the chances of your ever coming back again. Remember you have no authority; to assume any will be instantly fatal. Remember, too, that these children have been knocked about, wronged, robbed, imposed upon, driven hither and thither by policemen, till all the sweet likeness of childhood has been beaten out of them. Yet they are still children. The childish heart has been cruelly maimed and scarred; it is thick crusted over with that armor of deceit and indifference which is the only protection of the weak; but it is still there. You must find it; and there is but one road to the heart of man.

After a while there will come a blessed lull in hostilities. The tide will turn; they will begin to watch for you, and come running to meet you. Some accident will disclose a passion of gratitude and affection in some little breast, and when it breaks out it will be contagious. Then your heart will swell with happiness. But do not expect too much; there will be no wing-growing yet. The poison of evil, working so long, so persistently, cannot be eradicated in a few months or even years. You may, however, permit yourself a long breath at this point, and you may assure yourself that the worst is over.

I have in mind at this moment a group of youths, ranging in age from seventeen to twenty years, with whom I have been intimately associated for six years. They came to me first as newsboys and bootblacks, but they are now all mechanics, or other artisans, earning each from one to two dollars a day. There are about thirty-five of them. These are the boys who, through all vicissitudes of removal and change, have stuck to the club, until they now feel that they have outgrown it.

For two years they have had a club of their own, self-sustaining, with limited membership, a constitution, and regular business and social meetings. The presiding officer this winter is a good parliamentarian, and the business meetings are, for the most part, conducted with a goodly degree of decorum, though debate is sometimes windy, and we are at all times liable to sudden, and to me perfectly unaccountable, bursts of hilarity that are sadly disconcerting, and seem always to fall like untimely frosts upon my most serious efforts. The members of this club, as I see them at the meetings, are well-looking, well-dressed, stalwart young fellows, bright, alert, and ambitious. I believe them to be the pick of, perhaps, five hundred boys whose acquaintance I have made during the time I have known them. They are certainly promising in many ways, yet even the eye of love cannot blink their defects. The cruel marks of their street-training are still upon them. They, will, I fear, never be quite rubbed out.

The low ideals of a cheap social life, the craving for excitement born of their childish privations and stimulated by the daily grind of monotonous toil—too early thrust upon them—these lay them open to the temptations of the saloon, the dance-hall, and the low vaudeville "show." Alas, that it is so difficult to interest them in amusements more elevating in tendency! Not less deplorable are the low political standards toward which their young eyes are even now turning; for as they approach the age of full citizenship, the heeler and the boss are already getting in their deadly work. Many of them drink moderately, some of them immoderately at times; nearly all are users of tobacco. With them, life is taken so lightly, so recklessly. They are still

so cruel at some moments, so generous at others; so irresponsible at all times. In but one thing, it seems, are they steadfast: their loyalty to their friend and adviser has long been absolutely without a flaw.

That these and others have been greatly helped by their social life in the club it is impossible to doubt; that the result is in every case painfully unsatisfying, lamentably inadequate to the need, every worker must deeply feel.

The boys' club does not and cannot strike at the root of those evils that blight so many young lives in our cities; it is, at best, but a palliative; but it is one sorely needed in many an arid waste of our civilization, wherein our Ishmael yet roams, uncared for; his hand against every man—every man's hand against him.

When the home, the school, and the church are everything to the boy that they should be, he will have no need of the club. Until that day, it has its mission and stands second in importance to none of the great philanthropic schemes that serve, at least, to keep the fire of human love alive in the midst of a cold and materialistic age.

M. W. LAW.

MILWAUKEE, WIS.